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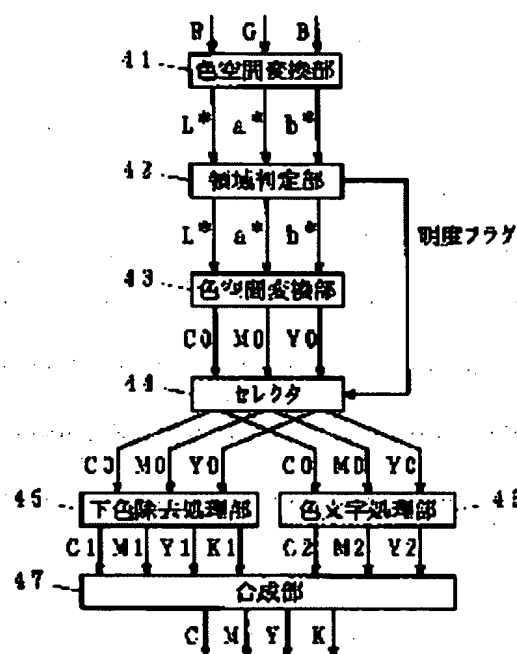
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(54) IMAGE PROCESSOR AND IMAGE FORMING SYSTEM

(57)Abstract:

PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED: To provide an image processor by which image quality of color characters is improved.

SOLUTION: For this image processing unit, when the attribute of an image denotes a color character, an area discrimination section 42 discriminates lightness of the character color and outputs a lightness flag denoting color characters for an object of color character processing except for a very dark color and a very light color. A selector 44 gives an images signal to an under color elimination processing section 45 or a color character processing section 46, in response to the lightness flag. The color character processing section 46 decides the color of a maximum value in color components and saturates the color of the maximum value to a maximum level. Thus, the color character is structured with a color saturated at a maximum level even when it is screen processed at post-stages. Thus, the edges of the color character are preserved, and the color character with satisfactory legibility is formed.



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CLAIMS

[Claim(s)]

[Claim 1] It is the image processing system which a picture signal classified into two or more attributes which contain a color alphabetic character at least is inputted, has a color transform-processing means perform color transform processing to said picture signal, in an image processing system which performs processing according to each of said attribute to said picture signal when said attribute is a color alphabetic character, and is characterized by for this color transform-processing means to perform at least color transform processing which saves an edge according to lightness of a color alphabetic character.

[Claim 2] It is the image processing system according to claim 1 which said color transform-processing means performs lower color clearance processing about a color alphabetic character with brightness darker than the 1st threshold, and is characterized by a bright alphabetic character not performing lower color clearance processing.

[Claim 3] Said color transform-processing means is an image processing system according to claim 1 or 2 characterized by performing color conversion so that it may extract the greatest color component of the color components which constitute an alphabetic character color and this color component may be saturated on the maximum level, when brightness of a color alphabetic character is darker than the 2nd threshold.

[Claim 4] Said color transform-processing means is an image processing system according to claim 1 or 2 characterized by performing color conversion so that it may extract the greatest color component of the color components which constitute an alphabetic character color and this color component may be saturated on the maximum level, when brightness of a color alphabetic character is darker than the perimeter and darker than said 2nd threshold.

[Claim 5] It is the image formation system characterized by having an image formation means to form a color picture by an image processing system and an area gradation method given in any 1 term of claim 1 thru/or claim 4, and said image formation means forming a frame of a color alphabetic character by color component which saturated the maximum level in said image processing system, and holding an edge and forming a color alphabetic character for other color components in piles by halftone dot.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[Detailed Description of the Invention]

[0001]

[The technical field to which invention belongs] This invention is carried in image formation equipments, such as a printer, and a digital process copying machine, facsimile apparatus, and relates to a suitable image processing system and the image formation system carrying this image processing system.

[0002]

[Description of the Prior Art] In a printer, a digital process copying machine, etc. in recent years, in order to raise the image quality of the image formed on the record medium—ed, various kinds of processings are performed. Since the effective processing technique changes with attributes of the image formed especially, processing according to the attribute of the image to form is performed, and improvement in image quality is in drawing. For example, an alphabetic character has many thin lines, and although a sharp image is required, it is tolerant to color gap of some. On the other hand, halftone images, such as a photograph, do not require the sharpness like an alphabetic character, while repeatability, such as brightness and a color tone, is required.

[0003] There is an area gradation method expressing the gradation of the color of each color material by changing the area colored with color material as the formation method of a color picture. In case an image is formed using this area gradation method, screen treatment is performed for every color of color material, respectively, and the image to form is formed as a halftone dot-like image. A full color image can be formed by forming the image of the shape of a halftone dot of such each color in piles.

[0004] However, since the image formed by this area gradation method is the meeting of a halftone dot fundamentally, it turns into an image which has graininess. Although graininess stopped becoming a problem not much by images, such as a photograph, by high resolution-ization in recent years, by the image as which the sharpness of the edge section is required like an alphabetic character or a line drawing, an edge portion is rough, it becomes notched, and there is a problem that image quality deteriorates. Furthermore, graininess is getting worse further by gap at the time of piling up actually the halftone dot image of the color corresponding to each color material etc.

[0005] Much technology which raises the image quality of a black alphabetic character conventionally is developed to such a problem. As an alphabetic character color, black is used frequently and is a means effective in improvement in image quality of a black alphabetic character. Moreover, some technology which improves image quality is developed also about the color alphabetic character.

[0006] For example, in the color picture processor indicated by JP,63-111766,A, a masking means is changed with a multicolor alphabetic character manuscript and a halftone manuscript, and color transform processing suitable for each manuscript is performed. Especially by this reference, the color muddiness in that color character boundary is controlled about 8 of the primary color which can be formed only with the color material of one color, and the secondary color formed with the color material of two colors colors. Specifically about these eight colors, it is made a pure color with a masking parameter.

[0007] Moreover, in JP,5-48892,A, color transform processing is changed by the black alphabetic character, the color alphabetic character, and the pattern which it is as a result of [by the color judging circuit and the alphabetic character judging circuit] a judgment. Especially about the color alphabetic character, it forms in either of the 8 of an above-mentioned primary color or a secondary color colors, and image quality is raised.

[0008] About such a primary color and a secondary color, good image quality can be acquired by applying the technology of an above-mentioned black alphabetic character about the color material of other colors. However, with such technology, an alphabetic character color can apply only to 8 of a primary color and a secondary color colors. Therefore, about the alphabetic character of neutral colors, it cannot reappear or graininess will remain. Thus, in the color reproduction of only eight colors, the rendering of sufficient color alphabetic character is impossible.

[0009] Moreover, in the color picture processor indicated by JP,1-264847,A, for example, the hue of an image was judged by the hue detector, about the color alphabetic character by which the edge extract was carried out, emphasis and an unnecessary color were removed for the need color, and muddiness of a color alphabetic character and deterioration of a black alphabetic character are prevented. Although the convention about the clear amount of emphasis is not indicated by this reference, only by the emphasis processing which raises the concentration of a need color, graininess cannot remain and cannot still reproduce the edge of a color alphabetic character good.

[0010] Thus, at a Prior art, it is only performing processing which specializes in the color limited as processing to a color alphabetic character, and emphasis processing which raises the concentration of a need color, and there was nothing that took the effect of screen treatment into consideration to the color alphabetic character of halftone.

[0011]

[Problem(s) to be Solved by the Invention] This invention was made in view of the situation mentioned above, and aims at offering the image formation system which can obtain the image processing system which can raise the image quality of a color alphabetic character, and the image whose image quality of a color alphabetic character improved with this image processing system.

[0012]

[Means for Solving the Problem] This invention performs color transform processing which saves an edge according to lightness about a color alphabetic character. For example, the greatest color component of the color components which constitute an alphabetic character color is extracted, and color conversion is performed so that the color component may be saturated on the maximum level. A color component which saturated this maximum level serves as a frame of a color alphabetic character, when an image of a color alphabetic character is formed, and the edge section of a color alphabetic character is reproduced good. Since a frame was formed upwards and color components other than a color component used as a frame of a color alphabetic character are piled up according to a halftone dot, they are reproducible also in a color alphabetic character of halftone. Moreover, it is possible by forming a frame for it to hardly be influenced also to gap at the time of piling up a halftone dot image of each color, but to form an image of good image quality.

[0013] In addition, since the amount of color material increases in the above color conversion and image quality deterioration may be caused when brightness of a color alphabetic character is darker than the 1st threshold, lower color clearance processing generates a black print. By generation of this black print, the total amount of color material can be decreased and image quality deterioration can be avoided. Moreover, in the case of a reversed character brighter than the perimeter and an alphabetic character brighter than the 2nd threshold, the greatest color component of the color components which constitute the above alphabetic character colors is extracted, and it can avoid carrying out to it color transform processing which saturates the color component on the maximum level. It is possible to prevent change of an extreme alphabetic character color by this.

[0014]

[Embodiment of the Invention] The block diagram in which drawing 1 shows one gestalt of operation of the image formation system of this invention, and drawing 2 are the block diagrams showing an example of the content of processing similarly. the inside of drawing, and 1 -- a host computer and 2 -- a printer and 3 -- a network and 11 -- application and 12 -- a driver and 21 -- for a color and the gradation amendment processing section, and 24, as for the printer engine section and 26, the screen treatment section and 25 are [the image-processing section and 22 / the rasterization processing section and 23 / a laser actuator and 27] the marking sections.

[0015] The image formation system shown in drawing 1 consists of a host computer 1 and a printer 2, and both are connected by the network 3. Moreover, the image which should be formed may be sent from devices, such as other computers, through this network 3. Furthermore, the image which should be formed may be sent through communication lines, such as the telephone line which is not illustrated.

[0016] In this example, the driver 12 for changing the application 11 which creates a document, an image, etc., and the image formed in a printer 2 into the format that a printer 2 can be interpreted, and transmitting it to a printer 2 is formed in the host computer 1. The document created with application 11 is transmitted to a driver 12, when the image formation to a record-medium-ed top is needed. The document transmitted to the driver 12 is changed into a Page Description Language (PDL). In description by this Page Description Language, the attribute information on that object is added with the information on the image (object) which should be formed actually. In drawing 2, this attribute information is independently shown as an image attribute signal.

[0017] The printer 2 has the image-processing section 21 and the printer engine section 25. The image-processing section 21 interprets the Page Description Language sent from a host computer 1, performs various kinds of image processings, and generates the picture signal which can form the best image in the printer engine section 25. At this time, the optimal image processing for the image of each attribute is performed according to the image attribute signal similarly sent from a host computer 1. The printer engine section 25 forms an image on a record medium-ed actually.

[0018] PDL sent to the printer 2 is interpreted in the rasterization processing section 22, and a raster image is formed. And in a color and the gradation amendment processing section 23, the color conversion and gradation amendment processing according to each attribute are performed. In especially this color and gradation amendment processing section 23, color transform processing which saves an edge according to the lightness of a color alphabetic character as one of the color transform processing to a color alphabetic character is performed. In the screen treatment section 24, screen treatment is performed after the processing in a color and the gradation amendment processing section 23 according to the property of the printer engine section 25. Of this screen treatment, the halftone dot image which carried out the area gradation modulation for every color of each color material is formed. As mentioned above, these processings are performed according to each attribute.

[0019] A halftone dot image is sent to the printer engine section 25, controls a laser beam by the laser actuator 26, forms a latent image, is developed in the marking section 27 and forms an image on a record medium-ed. Since color transform processing which saves an edge about a color alphabetic character in a color and the gradation amendment processing section 23 is performed at this time, even if it forms a color alphabetic character by the area gradation method, an image can be formed by good image quality.

[0020] Drawing 3 is the block diagram showing another example of the content of the processing in one gestalt of operation of the image formation system of this invention. 13 are a color and the gradation amendment processing section among drawing. In this example, a color and the gradation amendment processing section 13 are formed in the host computer 1 side. The content of the processing in this color and gradation amendment processing section 13 is the same as that of above-mentioned color and gradation amendment processing section 23. However, in this color and gradation amendment processing section 13, the picture signal described by PDL serves as a processing object. Therefore, color conversion and gradation

amendment processing will be performed to data added to the drawing object in PDL, such as a color and gradation. Color transform processing which saves an edge according to the lightness of a color alphabetic character as one of the color transform processing to a color alphabetic character at this event is performed.

[0021] What is necessary is just to perform screen treatment in the screen treatment section 24 in a printer 2 side, as it is, after changing into a raster image in the rasterization processing section 22 since PDL to which various kinds of processings were already performed is received.

[0022] In addition, although drawing 2 and drawing 3 showed the example using the marking method of the laser method which used the laser actuator 26 as the printer engine section 25, this invention is applicable to various kinds of marking methods not only using this but other area gradation methods.

[0023] Drawing 4 is the block diagram showing an example of a color and the gradation amendment processing section. As for 31–34, the color transform–processing section, and 35–38 are the gradation amendment sections among drawing. In the driver 12 of a host computer 1, an image is classified into four, a black alphabetic character, a color alphabetic character, a graph, and a photograph, according to this example, and each attribute is added and outputted in it. Of course, as long as the class of attribute includes the attribute of not only these but a color alphabetic character, even if other attributes exist, it may be easy to be natural [the class], and they may be other classification methods. Such an image attribute signal that is the information on an attribute is passed to a color and the gradation amendment processing section 23, or a color and the gradation amendment processing section 13 with a picture signal. In addition, in drawing 4, a continuous line shows a picture signal and the dashed line shows the image attribute signal, respectively.

[0024] A color and the gradation amendment processing sections 23 and 13 have switched the processing algorithm and processing parameter which are performed to a picture signal according to the attribute of each image currently outputted from the driver 12. The color transform–processing sections 31–34 perform color transform processing according to the attribute of each image while performing the color space conversion to the color space of the picture signal which should be outputted from the color space of the picture signal inputted. In this example, an input side shall be a CMYK color space and, as for color space conversion processing, a RGB color space and an output side perform conversion to a CMYK color space eventually from a RGB color space. Or an in-between color space may be used and it is $L^* a^* b^*$ as a middle color space here. Uniform color space is used and it is once $L^* a^* b^*$ from a RGB color space. After changing into uniform color space and performing color processing of after that various kinds, it is $L^* a^* b^*$. The color space conversion from uniform color space to a CMYK color space is performed. Of course, these color spaces may be examples and an input side, an output side, and a middle color space may be color spaces of arbitration.

[0025] Technique, such as a method of the look-up table which stored for example, the linearity masking method, the nonlinear masking method, or the conversion parameter in three dimension, can be used for conversion of these color spaces. The conversion parameter is designed for the purpose of color matching–coincidence, and optimization is performed by the attribute of an image. Of course, the conversion technique of these color spaces is also an example, and the method of arbitration may be used.

[0026] For example, in the color transform–processing section 34 which processes a picture signal when an image attribute is a photograph, the parameter with which the color difference becomes min is set up, and color repeatability is raised. Moreover, in the color transform–processing section 33 which processes a picture signal when an image attribute is a graph, the parameter which emphasizes the contrast between colors is set up so that he can understand the difference in the color of each graph to a user. In the color transform–processing section 31 which processes a picture signal when an image attribute is a black alphabetic character, an excessive color is not contained, but a parameter is set up so that it can reappear by the black color. And when an image attribute is a color alphabetic character, in the color transform–processing section 32 which processes a picture signal, the parameter with which the color difference becomes min fundamentally is set up, but color transform processing is performed so

that the rendering of an edge may be secured according to the lightness of an alphabetic character color.

[0027] The gradation amendment sections 35–38 mainly perform gradation amendment processing of gamma amendment according to the property of the printer engine section 25 etc. The processing algorithm and processing parameter which perform these gradation amendment sections 35–38 as well as the color transform–processing sections 31–34 to a picture signal according to the attribute of each image are switched.

[0028] The color transform–processing section 32 is explained further. As mentioned above, the color transform–processing section 32 performs color transform processing which was suitable for the color alphabetic character to the picture signal, when the attribute of an image is a color alphabetic character. In this invention, color transform processing is performed so that the rendering of an edge may be secured according to the lightness of an alphabetic character color. As mentioned above, by the recording method using an area gradation method, a halftone dot–like image is formed for every color of each color material by the screen treatment section 24, and a color picture is formed by recording in piles. Therefore, also in the portion of a color alphabetic character, the edge section becomes rickety with a halftone dot–like image. In this color transform–processing section 32, a color character manipulation is performed so that it may not be influenced of halftone–dot–izing by the screen treatment section 24 of such the latter part.

[0029] Specifically, the greatest color component is saturated on the maximum level among the color components of color material. The image with which the color component which saturated this maximum level is actually formed on a record medium–ed even if a halftone dot–like image is formed of the screen treatment section 24 is formed as an image near solid coating rather than it calls it the shape of a halftone dot. Therefore, the frame of a color alphabetic character is formed of this saturated color component, and an edge can be secured.

[0030] Thus, if the frame of a color alphabetic character is securable, even if it piles up a halftone dot–like image by the color of other color material, the edge of a color alphabetic character will be held to some extent. That is, compared with the color used as a frame, it is a thin color except the color used as a frame. Therefore, even if it piles up colors other than the color used as a frame as a halftone dot–like image, the image of the shape of those halftone dot is not conspicuous, and the edge of a deep color seemingly used for formation of a frame is secured.

[0031] Drawing 5 is the block block diagram showing an example of the color transform–processing section 32. For the field judging section and 44, as for the lower color clearance processing section and 46, a selector and 45 are [41 and 43 / the color space conversion section and 42 / the color character–manipulation section and 47] the synthetic sections among drawing. An example of the configuration for forming the frame of a color alphabetic character as mentioned above is shown in drawing 5 .

[0032] The color space conversion section 41 is the inputted picture signal of a RGB color space $L^* a^* b^*$ It changes into the picture signal of uniform color space. Transform processing of this color space is the judgment of the lightness of the image in the following field judging section 42 $L^* a^* b^*$ It is for carrying out in uniform color space. What is necessary is just to perform conversion to the color space which performs that judgment when the field judging section 42 judges in other color spaces, and when judging with the color space of the inputted picture signal, it is not necessary to form this color space conversion section 41. They are various kinds of color tone ready processings which are not illustrated when it changes into the picture signal of $L^* a^* b^*$ uniform color space like this example This $L^* a^* b^*$ It can constitute so that it may carry out in uniform color space, and processing can be simplified.

[0033] The field judging section 42 judges the lightness of an alphabetic character color. $L^* a^* b^*$ In the case of uniform color space, the lightness of an alphabetic character color is L^* . It can judge only with a value. L^* A signal is compared with a threshold ThL and it classifies into the alphabetic character of a color darker than a threshold ThL , and the alphabetic character of the bright color beyond a threshold ThL . About the alphabetic character of a color darker than a threshold ThL , "0" is outputted in this example as a lightness flag by the lower color clearance

processing section 45 that a black print (K) should be generated. Moreover, about the alphabetic character of the bright color beyond a threshold ThL, "1" is outputted in this example as a lightness flag that a frame should be formed in the maximum color in the color character-manipulation section 46. As a concrete value of a threshold ThL, it can carry out, for example to about 50.

[0034] In addition, about the alphabetic character of a very bright color, if the color character-manipulation section 46 performs color conversion, change of a color will become large too much. Therefore, about the alphabetic character of a color brighter than a threshold ThH, it is supposed that processing by the color character-manipulation section 46 is not performed here, using a lightness flag as "0." The alphabetic character of use of a very bright color is rare when the usual background color is white. However, in the case of a reversed character (negative alphabetic character), it may be used. In the case of such a reversed character, to a color alphabetic character, it may not process as mentioned above, but processing which forms an edge about a surrounding high-concentration background may be carried out to it.

[0035] At this example, the field judging section 42 is $L^* a^* b^*$. Although classified by judging the lightness of a color alphabetic character in uniform color space, you may classify according to not only this but other uniform color space, and a RGB color space and a CMY color space.

Moreover, it can also carry out adjustable [of the threshold for a classification] with every color and a hue angle. Repeatability can be raised by this.

[0036] The color space conversion section 43 is $L^* a^* b^*$. The picture signal of uniform color space is changed into the picture signal of a CMY color space. This CMY color space is a color space which consists of a color (except for black) of the color material used in the printer engine section 25. In addition, at this event, the black print (K) for forming an image using a black color material is not created. What is necessary is just to change into the color space doubled with the color of the color material, when the colors of the color material to be used differ. By changing such a color space, the burden in the printer engine section 25 is mitigated.

[0037] A selector 44 sends the picture signal by which the color space conversion was carried out to the processing section which chose and chose either the lower color clearance processing section 45 or the color character-manipulation section 46 in the color space conversion section 43 according to the value of the lightness flag outputted from the field judging section 42. Here, when a lightness flag is "1", the color space conversion section 43 is chosen, and when a lightness flag is "0", the bottom color clearance processing section 45 is chosen.

[0038] The lower color clearance processing section 45 generates a black print (K) signal from the picture signal of a CMY color space. As concrete processing, the minimum chrominance signal is determined among each chrominance signal of C, M, and Y. And the amount (0 - 100%) of the minimum chrominance signal to arbitration is determined, and while making the determined amount into a black print (K) signal, only the determined amount is subtracted from each chrominance signal. It can change into the amount of color material of C, M, Y, and K which does not become a burden at the printer engine section 25 by this processing, with lightness and color reproduction held.

[0039] In addition, when a black print is generated and an image is formed by this lower color clearance processing section 45, muddiness may be produced about the color of the brightness beyond inside lightness. Therefore, a black print is not generated in the color character-manipulation section 46 which processes the color alphabetic character of a dark color.

[0040] The rate (amount of above-mentioned arbitration) which generates a black print according to brightness in case a black print is generated in the lower color clearance section 45 can be changed. For example, about a bright color, 0, i.e., a black print, is not [the rate which generates a black print] generable, either. Although it is a time of a lightness flag being "0" that the lower color clearance processing section 45 is chosen in a selector 44, this has the lightness of an alphabetic character color smaller than a threshold ThL, or is at the larger time than a threshold ThH. When the lightness of an alphabetic character color is larger than a threshold ThH, it can constitute being able to use as 0 the rate which generates a black print so that it may output as it is, without generating a black print.

[0041] The color character-manipulation section 46 performs processing which saturates the greatest color component on the maximum level of a color component among the color components of C, M, and Y. Drawing 6 is the block block diagram showing an example of the color character-manipulation section 46. As for 51, the maximum color decision section and 52 are the saturation processing sections among drawing. If the color character-manipulation section 46 is chosen by the selector 44 and the picture signal of a CMY color space is passed, the picture signal will be inputted into the maximum color decision section 51 and the saturation processing section 52. In the maximum color decision section 51, a value detects the greatest color component among the color components of C, M, and Y. And the saturation processing section 52 is passed by making the signal which shows the detected color component into the maximum color flag. Here, it shall express, respectively that C component is max at the time of "10" about M component being max at the time of "01" about Y component being max when the maximum color flag is "00."

[0042] The saturation processing section 52 saturates the color component on the maximum level about the color component which the maximum color flag passed from the maximum color decision section 51 shows. For example, if each color component is shown by 8 bits and the value of 0 to 255 is taken, the value of the color component which the maximum color flag shows is set to 255. About other color components, it does not change as it is.

[0043] Thus, since the color which saturated the maximum level by the saturation processing section 52 is outputted as a solid image rather than it calls it a halftone dot-like image even if it is outputted through the screen treatment section 24, it can reproduce an edge good and serves as a frame of a color alphabetic character. That is, the color which serves as a frame of a color alphabetic character in the maximum color decision section 51 is determined, and color conversion is performed so that an edge may be saved about the color which serves as the frame in the saturation processing section 52.

[0044] The synthetic section 47 packs the picture signal processed for every alphabetic character color in either the lower color clearance processing section 45 or the color character-manipulation section 46, and outputs it as a picture signal of a CMYK color space. As the picture signal after the outputted processing is shown in drawing 4, it is inputted into the gradation amendment section 36 for color alphabetic characters, and gradation amendment processing is performed.

[0045] Drawing 7 is a flow chart which shows the example of operation in an example of the color transform-processing section 32. It is the picture signal which shows the inputted color alphabetic character of a RGB color space in S61 first at the color space conversion section 41 $L^* a^* b^*$. It changes into the picture signal of uniform color space. And it sets to S62 and the field judging section 42 is lightness L^* in a picture signal. As compared with a threshold ThL , an alphabetic character darker than a threshold ThL and the bright alphabetic character beyond a threshold ThL is judged for a value. In being an alphabetic character darker than a threshold ThL , in S64, it sets "0" as a lightness flag so that a black print may be created in the lower color clearance processing section 45. Moreover, since it is better not to perform processing by the color character-manipulation section 46 about a very bright alphabetic character when it is an alphabetic character brighter than a threshold ThL , about an alphabetic character brighter than a threshold ThH , "0" is too set as a lightness flag in S64. If it is an alphabetic character darker than a threshold ThH , in S63, "1" will be set as a lightness flag. After setting out of such a lightness flag finishes, it sets to S65, and it is $L^* a^* b^*$. The picture signal of uniform color space is changed into the picture signal of a CMY color space in the color space conversion section 43.

[0046] In S66, with reference to the lightness flag set up in S63 or S64, if a lightness flag is "0", a selector 44 will choose the lower color clearance processing section 45, and will perform lower color clearance processing in S67. By this processing, a black print (K) is generated about the alphabetic character of very dark colors, such as dark brown and deep blue.

[0047] While determining the minimum chrominance signal among each chrominance signal of C, M, and Y as mentioned above and making the amount of arbitration into a black print (K) signal from that minimum chrominance signal as this lower color clearance processing, only that

amount is subtracted from each chrominance signal. Drawing 8 is explanatory drawing by the example of lower color clearance processing. The case where the alphabetic character of the dark color in which each color components C0, M0, and Y0 of C, M, and Y have a big value now as shown in drawing 8 (A) becomes a processing object is considered. In addition, there are so many amounts of color material that each color value of C, M, and Y is large, and it serves as a deep color.

[0048] Among C0, M0, and Y0, the minimum chrominance signal is M component, as shown in drawing 8 (B). It considers as the value K1 of the black print which shows the amount of arbitration to drawing 8 (C) among the values M0 of this M component. And C0, M0, and Y0 to K1 is reduced, and it changes into C1, M1, and Y1. Thus, the picture signal of a CMYK color space as shown in drawing 8 (C) is acquired.

[0049] In the picture signal acquired in the lower color clearance processing section 45 as mentioned above, although total of the value of each color component serves as the total amount of color material, the directions of (C) are decreasing in number [the total amount of color material] compared with drawing 8 (A). Thus, if an image is formed without the alphabetic character of a dark color generating a black print, the amount of color material may increase, and scattering of the color material generated by the oversupply of color material in printer engine 25, the omission of the alphabetic character circumference, etc. may occur. By performing lower color clearance processing and generating a black print by the lower color clearance processing section 45, the total amount of color material decreases and such image quality deterioration has an advantage of stopping arising.

[0050] In addition, even if a lightness flag is "0", in the case of a very bright alphabetic character, the lower color clearance processing in the lower color clearance processing section 45 is canceled, or to it, it processes so that [a black print] it may not be generated substantially. By this, a very bright alphabetic character can be processed so that lightness may not fall.

[0051] When a lightness flag is "1" in return and S66, a selector 44 chooses the color character-manipulation section 46, and performs color transform processing to a color alphabetic character to drawing 7. As for this color transform processing, red and the vivid dark color of being green serve as a processing object. In S68, the color component which has the greatest value among each color component of C, M, and Y is first determined in the maximum color decision section 51. The color component which has the determined greatest value is outputted as a maximum color flag. In S69, it judges whether the color component for which the maximum color flag has "00", i.e., the greatest value, is a Y component. When Y component has the greatest value, in S70, the value of Y component is saturated on the maximum level. Here, each color component sets the value of Y component as 255 in the thing which takes the value of 0-255, then S70.

[0052] In S71, it judges similarly whether the color component for which the maximum color flag has "01", i.e., the greatest value, is an M component. When M component has the greatest value, in S72, the value of M component is set to the maximum level, 255 [for example,], and is saturated. If the value of Y and M component is not max, the value of C component is max. In S73, the value of C component is set to the maximum level, 255 [for example,], and is saturated.

[0053] Drawing 9 is explanatory drawing by the example of a color character manipulation. The case where the alphabetic character which has each color components C0, M0, and Y0 of C, M, and Y as shown in drawing 9 (A) now becomes a processing object is considered. In addition, like drawing 8, there are so many amounts of color material that each color value of C, M, and Y is large, and it serves as a deep color. When the color component which has the greatest value first is investigated, as shown in drawing 9 (B), the value C0 of C component is the greatest value. Therefore, "10" which shows that C component has the greatest value as a maximum color flag is outputted. According to the flow chart shown in drawing 7, the value of C component is saturated in S73 in 255 which is the maximum level. As this shows to drawing 9 (C), the value of C component serves as the maximum level. Other color components remain as it is. In addition, a black print is not made in this color character-manipulation section 46. This has protected that a

vivid dark color becomes muddy.

[0054] Thus, screen treatment of the picture signal of the color alphabetic character which performed color transform processing is carried out in the screen treatment section 24, and an image is formed in the printer engine section 25. Then, about the color component which saturated the maximum level, although halftone-dot-sized by screen treatment, the formed image becomes close to a solid image, and is hardly influenced of screen treatment. Therefore, the frame of a color alphabetic character is formed of the color component which saturated this maximum level. Although a halftone dot-like image will be formed in piles about other colors, concentration is thinner than the color component which saturated the maximum level, and it does not appear for appearance so notably. Therefore, the frame of the color component formed of the color component which saturated the maximum level is held, and a color alphabetic character can be formed by good image quality.

[0055] Furthermore, by forming the frame of a color alphabetic character, even if the image of the shape of a halftone dot of other colors formed on it shifts somewhat, there is little effect and it serves as the powerful image-processing method to the fluctuation and the gap of the registration of each color in the printer engine section 25.

[0056] In addition, the alphabetic character color formed of such a color character manipulation compared with the alphabetic character color which the inputted picture signal shows will change a little. However, since the sharpness of an edge is desired rather than the repeatability of a color in the case of a color alphabetic character, by forming the color alphabetic character which held the edge like this invention, a good color alphabetic character can be reproduced and image quality can be raised.

[0057] Moreover, change of a color will become large if processing by this color character-manipulation section 46 is performed about a very bright color. However, about the above very bright color, change of a big color is prevented by not performing processing by this color character-manipulation section 46. In addition, the frequency used in which background with the white alphabetic character of a very bright color is low, and is mainly used by a reversed character etc. in many cases. In a reversed character, since the direction of the perimeter is a dark color, it is more desirable than the interior of an alphabetic character to process so that the edge of an alphabetic character may be saved in a surrounding image.

[0058] Conversely, if the value of each color component is large as drawing 8 showed the very dark alphabetic character, and color conversion is performed so that you may make it saturated to the maximum level about the further greatest color component, the total amount of color material will increase further. Therefore, processing by the color character-manipulation section 46 is omitted also about the very dark alphabetic character here. The processing in this case is as the lower color clearance processing in S67 having described. In addition, in a very dark alphabetic character, since each color component does not appear so notably, the graininess by screen treatment may perform image formation, without also performing lower color clearance processing as it is.

[0059] The picture signal processed by drawing 7 for every return and alphabetic character color in the lower color clearance processing section 45 or the color character-manipulation section 46 is compounded in the synthetic section 47, and the picture signal of the compound CMYK color space is sent to the gradation amendment section 36 of the next step. The picture signal after performing gradation amendment processing in the gradation amendment section 36 serves as an output of a color and the gradation amendment processing sections 23 and 13.

[0060] In addition, also about the image of other attributes, various kinds of color space conversion processings, color correction processings, etc. in the color transform-processing sections 31, 33, and 34 are performed, and gradation amendment processing is further performed and outputted in the gradation amendment sections 35, 37, and 38, respectively. In the system shown in drawing 2, screen treatment will be carried out in the screen treatment section 24 based on this output, and an image will be formed on a record medium-ed in the printer engine section 25. Moreover, in the system shown in drawing 3, this output will be sent to a printer 2, rasterization processing and screen treatment will be performed in the image-processing section 21, and an image will be formed on a record medium-ed in the printer engine section 25.

[0061] Although one gestalt of above-mentioned operation showed as an example the image formation system by which the printer 2 was connected with the host computer 1 in the network etc., in this invention, it does not restrict to this. For example, the configuration that the host computer 1 and the printer 2 were united may be used. Moreover, the system equipped with image input devices, such as a scanner and a digital camera, may be constituted, for example, it can also apply to a copying machine, facsimile, etc. What is necessary is to judge an attribute for every image field by pictorial symbol separation processing etc. from the image obtained from the image input device, and just to perform processing which saves an edge about a color alphabetic character as mentioned above in the system equipped with such an image input device.

[0062]

[Effect of the Invention] Since the image which saved the edge about the color alphabetic character can be formed according to this invention so that clearly from the above explanation, the color alphabetic character which has good readability is reproducible. Moreover, since the edge is made to hold by the color used as the frame of a color alphabetic character in case processing which saves an edge is performed, an edge is not harmed even if it piles up the image of the shape of a halftone dot of other thin colors. On the contrary, a good image can be obtained even if the image of the shape of those halftone dot shifts. Furthermore, in order to generate a black print about a very dark alphabetic character, according to this invention, there are various effects -- image quality deterioration of the oversupply of color material, the omission of an alphabetic character circumference portion, etc. can be prevented.

[Translation done.]

ワーク3を介して他のコンピュータなどの機器から、形成すべき画像が送られてくる場合もある。さらに、図示しない電話回線などの通信回線を介して、形成すべき画像が送られてきてよい。

【0016】この例では、ホストコンピュータ1には、文書や画像などを作成するアプリケーション11と、プリンタ2において形成する画像を、プリンタ2が解釈可能な形式に変換してプリンタ2に転送するためのドライバ12が設けられている。アプリケーション11で作成されたドキュメントは、被記録媒体上への画像形成が必要になったとき、ドライバ12に転送される。ドライバ12に転送されたドキュメントは、例えばページ記述言語(PDL)に変換される。このページ記述言語による記述の中には、実際に形成すべき画像(オブジェクト)の情報とともに、そのオブジェクトの属性情報が付加されている。図2においては、この属性情報を別に画像属性信号として示している。

【0017】プリンタ2は、画像処理部21とプリンタエンジン部25を有している。画像処理部21は、ホストコンピュータ1から送られてくるページ記述言語を解釈し、各種の画像処理を施して、プリンタエンジン部25において最良の画像の形成が可能な画像信号を生成する。このとき、同じくホストコンピュータ1から送られてくる画像属性信号に応じて、各属性の画像に最適な画像処理を施す。プリンタエンジン部25は、実際に被記録媒体上に画像を形成する。

【0018】プリンタ2に送られてきたPDLは、ラスタ化処理部22において解釈され、ラスタイメージが形成される。そして色・階調補正処理部23において、各属性に応じた色変換や階調補正処理を行う。この色・階調補正処理部23では、特に色文字に対する色変換処理の一つとして、色文字の明度に応じてエンジンを保存する色変換処理を行う。色・階調補正処理部23における処理の後、スクリーン処理部24においてプリンタエンジン部25の特性に合わせてスクリーン処理を行う。このスクリーン処理により、各色材の色ごとに面積補正調整した網点画像が形成される。上述のように、これらの処理は、各属性に応じ行われる。

【0019】網点画像はプリンタエンジン部25に送られ、レーザ駆動部26でレーザ光を制御して潜像を形成し、マーキング部27で現像して被記録媒体上に画像を形成する。このとき、色・階調補正処理部23で色文字についてエンジンを保存する色変換処理を行っているので、面積補正法によって色文字を形成しても、良好な画質で画像を形成することができる。

【0020】図3は、本発明の画像形成システムの実施の一形態における処理の内容の別の例を示すブロック図である。図中、13は色・階調補正処理部である。この例では、ホストコンピュータ1側に色・階調補正処理部13を設けている。この色・階調補正処理部13にお

けない。

【0010】このように、従来の技術では、色文字に対する処理として限定された色に特化する処理や、必要色の濃度を高める強調処理を行うのみであり、中間調の色文字に対してスクリーン処理の影響を考慮したものはなかった。

【0011】本発明が解決しようとする課題【本発明は、上述した事項に鑑みてなされたもので、色文字の画質を向上させることのできる画像処理装置、および、この画像処理装置によって色文字の画質が向上した画像を得ることのできる画像形成システムを提供することを目的とするものである。

【0012】

【課題を解決するための手段】本発明は、色文字については、明度に応じたエンジンを保存する色変換処理を行う。例えば色文字色を構成する色成分のうちの最大の色成分を抽出し、その色成分を最大レベルに飽和させるように色変換を行う。この最大レベルに飽和させた色成分は、色文字の画像を形成したときに色文字の骨格となり、色文字のエッジ部が良好に再現される。色文字の骨格となる色成分以外の色成分は、骨格が形成された上に網点によって重ねられるので、中間調の色文字でも再現可能である。また、骨格が形成されていることによって、各色の網点画像を重ねる際のズレに対してもほとんど影響を受けず、良好な画質の画像を形成することが可能である。

【0013】なお、色文字の明るさが第1の閾値よりも暗い場合には、上述のような色変換では色材量が增加して画質劣化を起こすことがあるので、下色除去処理によって墨版を生成する。この墨版の生成によって、総色材量を減少させて画質劣化を回避することができ、また、周囲よりも明るい反転文字や、第2の閾値よりも明るい文字の場合には、上述のような文字色を構成する色成分のうちの最大の色成分を抽出し、その色成分を最大レベルに飽和させるような色変換処理を行わないようにすることができ、これによって、極端な文字色の変化を防止することが可能である。

【0014】

【発明の実施の形態】図1は、本発明の画像形成システムの実施の一形態を示す構成図、図2は、同じく処理の内容の一例を示すブロック図である。図中、1はホストコンピュータ、2はプリンタ、3はネットワーク、11はアプリケーション、12はドライバ、21は画像処理部、22はラスタ化処理部、23は色・階調補正処理部、24はスクリーン処理部、25はプリンタエンジン部、26はレーザ駆動部、27はマーキング部である。【0015】図1に示した画像形成システムは、ホストコンピュータ1とプリンタ2から構成され、ネットワーク3によって両者が接続されている。また、このネット

る処理の内容は、上述の色・階調補正処理部23と同様である。しかしこの色・階調補正処理部13では、PDLで記述された画像信号が処理対象となる。そのため、PDL内の描画オブジェクトに付加されている色や階調などのデータに対して色変換や階調補正処理を行うことになる。この時点で、色文字に対する色変換処理の一つとして、色文字の明度に応じてエンジンを保存する色変換処理を行う。

【0021】プリンタ2側では、すでに各種の処理が施されたPDLを受け取るので、ラスタ化処理部22でラスタ画像に変換した後、そのままスクリーン処理部24においてスクリーン処理を行えばよい。

【0022】なお、図2、図3では、プリンタエンジン部25としてレーザ駆動部26を用いたレーザ方式のマーキング方式を用いた例を示したが、本発明はこれに限らず、他の面積補正法を用いる各種のマーキング方式に対して適用可能である。

【0023】図4は、色・階調補正処理部の一例を示すブロック図である。図中、31～34は色変換処理部、35～38は階調補正部である。この例では、ホストコンピュータ1のドライバ12において、画像を色文字、色文字、グラフ、写真の4つに分類し、それぞれの属性を付加して出力している。もちろん、属性の種類はこれに限らず、色文字の属性を含んでいれ、他の属性が存在してももちろんよいし、他の分類方法であってもよい。このような属性の情報である画像属性信号が、画像信号とともに色・階調補正処理部23または色・階調補正処理部13に渡される。なお、図4において実線は画像信号を、破線は画像属性信号をそれぞれ示している。

【0024】色・階調補正処理部23、13は、ドライバ12から出力されている各画像の属性に応じた、画像信号に対して行う処理アルゴリズムや処理パラメータを切り換えている。色変換処理部31～34は、入力される画像信号の色空間から出力すべき画像信号の色空間への色空間変換を行うとともに、各画像の属性に応じた色変換処理を行う。色空間変換処理は、この例では入力側がRGB色空間、出力側がCMYK色空間であるものとし、RGB色空間から最終的にCMYK色空間への変換を行う。あるいは、中間的な色空間を用いてもよく、ここでは中間の色空間としてL*a*b*均等色空間を用い、RGB色空間からいったんL*a*b*均等色空間に変換し、その後各種の色処理を行った後に、L*a*b*均等色空間からCMYK色空間への色空間変換を行っている。もちろん、これらの色空間は一例であって、入力側、出力側、中間の色空間とも、任意の色空間であってよい。

【0025】これらの色空間の変換には、例えば線形マスキング法、非線形マスキング法、または変換パラメータを3次元的に格納したルックアップテーブルの方式等の手法を用いることができる。変換パラメータは、等色

的な一致を目視に設計されており、画像の属性によって最適化が行われる。もちろん、これらの色空間の変換手法も一例であって、任意の方式を用いてよい。

【0026】例えば、画像属性が写真の場合に画像信号を処理する色変換処理部34では、色差が最小になるパラメータを設定し、色再現性を向上させる。また、画像属性がグラフの場合に画像信号を処理する色変換処理部33では、各グラフの色の違いも利用者に理解できるように、色調のコントラストを強調するパラメータを設定する。画像属性が黒文字の場合に画像信号を処理する色変換処理部31では、余計な色が含まれず、黒のみの色で再現できるようにパラメータを設定する。そして画像属性が色文字の場合に画像信号を処理する色変換処理部32では、基本的に色差が最小になるパラメータを設定するが、文字色の明度に応じてエンジンの再現を確保するように色変換処理を施す。

【0027】階調補正部35～38は、例えば、プリンタエンジン部25の特性に応じた補正などの階調補正処理を主に、この階調補正部35～38も、色変換処理部31～34と同様に各画像の属性に応じて画像信号に対して行う処理アルゴリズムや処理パラメータを切り換える。

【0028】色変換処理部32についてさらに説明する。上述のように色変換処理部32は、画像の属性が色文字の場合に、画像信号に対して色文字に適した色変換処理を行う。本発明では、文字色の明度に応じてエンジンの再現を確保するように色変換処理を施す。上述のように、面積補正法を用いた記載方式では、スクリーン処理部24によって各色材の色ごとに網点状の画像を形成し、重ねて記録することによってカラー一面を形成する。そのため、色文字の部分も網点状の画像によりエッジ部がガタガタになる。この色変換処理部32では、このような後段のスクリーン処理部24による網点化の影響を受けないように、色文字処理を施す。

【0029】具体的には、例えば色材の色成分のうち、最大の色成分を最大レベルに飽和させる。この最大レベルに飽和させた色成分は、スクリーン処理部24によって網点状の画像が形成されても、実際に被記録媒体上に形成される画像は、網点状というよりはベタ塗りに近い、画像として形成される。そのため、この飽和させた色成分により色文字の骨格が形成され、エンジンを確保することができる。

【0030】このようにして色文字の骨格が確保できると、他の色材の色で網点状の画像を重ねても、色文字のエッジはある程度保持される。すなわち、骨格となる色以外は、骨格となる色に比べて薄い色である。そのため、骨格となる色以外の色を網点状の画像として重ねても、それらの網点状の画像が目立たず、見かけ上は骨格の形成に用いた薄い色のエンジが確保される。

【0031】図5は、色変換処理部32の一例を示すプ

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ロック構成図である。図中、4.1、4.3は色空間変換部、4.2は領域判定部、4.4はセレクトタ、4.5は下色除去処理部、4.6は色文字処理部、4.7は合成部である。上述のようにして色文字の骨格を形成するための構成の一例を図5に示している。

【0032】色空間変換部4.1は、入力されたRGB色空間の画像信号を、 $L^*a^*b^*$ 均等色空間の画像信号に変換する。この色空間の変換処理は、次の領域判定部4.2における画像の明度の判定を $L^*a^*b^*$ 均等色空間において行うためである。領域判定部4.2が他の色空間において判定を行う場合には、その判定を行う色空間への変換を行えばよいし、入力された画像信号の色空間のまま判定を行う場合には、この色空間変換部4.1を設けなくともよい。この例のように $L^*a^*b^*$ 均等色空間の画像信号に変換した場合、図示しない各種の色調整処理などをこの $L^*a^*b^*$ 均等色空間において行うように構成し、処理を簡素化することができる。

【0033】領域判定部4.2は、文字色の明度を判定する。 $L^*a^*b^*$ 均等色空間の場合、文字色の明度は、 L^* の値のみによって判定できる。 L^* 信号と閾値ThLとを比較し、閾値ThLよりも暗い色の文字と閾値ThL以上の明るい色の文字に分類する。閾値ThLよりも暗い色の文字については、下色除去処理部4.5によって、墨版(K)を生成すべく、明度フラグとしてこの例では「1」を出力する。閾値ThLの具体的な値としては、例えば50程度とすることができる。

【0034】なお、とても明るい色の文字については、色文字処理部4.6によって色変換を行うと、色の変化が大きくなりすぎる。そのため、ここでは閾値ThHより明るい色の文字については明度フラグを「0」として、色文字処理部4.6による処理を行わないこととしている。とても明るい色の文字は、通常の背景色が白の場合には使用されることはまれである。しかし、反転文字(ネガ文字)の場合には利用されることがある。このように反転文字の場合には、上述のように色文字に対しては処理を行わず、周囲の高濃度の背景についてエッジを形成する処理を行ってもよい。

【0035】この例では、領域判定部4.2は $L^*a^*b^*$ 均等色空間において色文字の明度を判定して分類を行っているが、これに限らず、他の均等色空間や、RGB色空間、CMY色空間で分類を行ってもよい。また、分類のための閾値は、色ごと、例えば、色相角度によって可変することもできる。これによって再現性を向上させることができる。

【0036】色空間変換部4.3は、 $L^*a^*b^*$ 均等色空間の画像信号を、CMY色空間の画像信号に変換する。このCMY色空間は、プリンタエンジン部2.5で用

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M成分が最大であることを、「10」のときC成分が最大であることを、それぞれ表すものとする。

【0042】飽和処理部5.2は、最大色決定部5.1から渡される最大色フラグが示す色成分について、その色成分を最大レベルに飽和させる。例えば各色成分が8ビットで示され、0から255の値を取るとすれば、最大色フラグが示す色成分の値を255にする。その他の色成分についてはそのまま変更しない。

【0043】このようにして飽和処理部5.2によって最大レベルに飽和させた色は、スクリーン処理部2.4を介して出力されるも網点状の画像というよりはベタの画像として出力されるため、エッジを良好に再現することができ、色文字の骨格となる。すなわち、最大色決定部5.1で色文字の骨格となる色を決定し、飽和処理部5.2でその骨格となる色についてエッジを保存するように色変換を行っているのである。

【0044】合成部4.7は、各文字色ごとに下色除去処理部4.5または色文字処理部4.6のいずれかで処理された画像信号をまとめ、CMYK色空間の画像信号として出力する。出力された処理後の画像信号は、図4に示すように、色文字用の階調補正部3.6に入力され、階調補正処理が施される。

【0045】図7は、色変換処理部3.2の一例における動作例を示すフローチャートである。まずS6.1において、入力されたRGB色空間の色文字を示す画像信号を、色空間変換部4.1で $L^*a^*b^*$ 均等色空間の画像信号に変換する。そしてS6.2において、領域判定部4.2は画像信号中の明度 L^* の値を閾値ThLと比較し、閾値ThLより暗い文字か、閾値ThL以上の明るい文字かを判定する。閾値ThLより暗い文字である場合には、下色除去処理部4.5で墨版を作成するように、図4において明度フラグに「0」を設定する。また、閾値ThLより明るい文字である場合、非常に明るい文字については色文字処理部4.6による処理を行わない方がよい

ため、閾値ThHより明るい文字についてはやはりS6.4において明度フラグに「0」を設定する。閾値ThHより暗い文字であれば、S6.3において明度フラグに「1」を設定する。このような明度フラグの設定が終わった後、S6.5において $L^*a^*b^*$ 均等色空間の画像信号を色空間変換部4.3でCMY色空間の画像信号に変換する。

【0046】S6.6において、S6.3またはS6.4において設定した明度フラグを参照し、明度フラグが「0」であればセレクトタ4.4は下色除去処理部4.5を選択し、S6.7において下色除去処理を行う。この処理によって、焦げ茶や濃いブルーなど、非常に暗い色の文字について墨版(K)を生成する。

【0047】この下色除去処理としては、上述のようにC、M、Yの各色信号のうち最小の色信号を決定し、その最小の色信号から任意の量を墨版(K)信号とすると

ともに、その量だけ各色信号から減じる。図8は、下色除去処理の具体例による説明図である。いま、図8(A)に示すようにC、M、Yの各色成分C0、M0、Y0とも大きな値を持つ暗い色の文字が処理対象となっ場合を考える。なお、C、M、Yの各色値は、大きいほど色材が多く、濃い色となる。

【0048】C0、M0、Y0のうち、最小の色信号は図8(B)に示すようにM成分である。このM成分の値M0のうち、任意の量を図8(C)に示す墨版の値K1とする。そして、C0、M0、Y0からK1を減じ、C1、M1、Y1に変換する。このようにして図8(C)に示すようなCMYK色空間の画像信号が得られる。

【0049】上述のようにして下色除去処理部4.5で得られた画像信号において、各色成分の値の総和が総色材量となるが、図8(A)に比べて(C)の方が総色材量が減少している。このように、暗い色の文字で墨版を生成しないで画像を形成すると色材量が多くなり、プリンタエンジン2.5において色材の供給過多によって発生する色材の飛散や文字周辺の抜け等が現れる場合がある。下色除去処理部4.5によって下色除去処理を行って墨版を生成することにより、総色材量が減少し、このような画像劣化は生じなくなるという利点がある。

【0050】なお、明度フラグが「0」であっても、非常に明るい文字の場合には、下色除去処理部4.5における下色除去処理をキャンセルした、あるいは実質的に墨版を生成されないように処理を行う。これによって非常に明るい文字について、明度が低下することがないように処理できる。

【0051】図7に戻り、S6.6において明度フラグが「1」であった場合には、セレクトタ4.4は色文字処理部4.6を選択し、色文字に対する色変換処理を行う。この色変換処理は、赤や緑といった鮮やかな濃色が処理対象となる。まずS6.8において、C、M、Yの各色成分のうち、最大の値を有する色成分を最大色決定部5.1で決定する。決定した最大の値を有する色成分を、最大色フラグとして出力する。S6.9において、最大色フラグが「0」、すなわち最大の値を有する色成分がY成分であるか否かを判定する。Y成分が最大の値を有する場合

には、S7.0においてY成分の値を最大レベルに飽和させる。ここでは各色成分とも0〜255の値を取るものとする。S7.0においてY成分の値を255に設定する。

【0052】同様にS7.1において、最大色フラグが「01」、すなわち最大の値を有する色成分がM成分であるか否かを判定する。M成分が最大の値を有する場合には、S7.2においてM成分の値を最大レベル、例えば255に設定して飽和させる。Y、M成分の値が最大でなければ、C成分の値が最大である。S7.3において、C成分の値を最大レベル、例えば255に設定して飽和させる。

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【0053】図9は、色文字処理の具体例による説明図である。いま、図9(A)に示すようなC、M、Yの各色成分C0、M0、Y0を有する文字が処理対象となった場合を考える。なお図8と同様に、C、M、Yの各色値は、大きいほど色分量が多く、低い色となる。まず最大値を有する色成分を調べると、図9(B)に示すようにC成分の値C0が最大値である。そのため、最大色分量としてはC成分が最大値を有することを示す「10」が出力される。図7に示したフローチャートに従い、S73においてC成分の値を最大レベルである255に飽和させる。これによって図9(C)に示すようにC成分の値は最大レベルとなる。他の色成分はそのままである。なお、この色文字処理部46においては墨版を作らない。これによって、鮮やかな緑色が漏るのを防いでいる。

【0054】このようにして色変換処理を施した色文字の画像信号をスクリーン処理部24でスクリーン処理し、プリンタエンジン部25で画像を形成する。すると、最大レベルに飽和させた色成分については、スクリーン処理によって線点化するものの、形成された画像はベタの画像に近くなり、ほとんどスクリーン処理の影響を受けない。そのため、この最大レベルに飽和させた色成分によって色文字の骨格が形成される。他の色については線点状の画像を重ねて形成することになるが、最大レベルに飽和させた色成分よりも濃度が薄く、見目にはそれほど顕著には現れない。そのため、最大レベルに飽和させた色成分によって形成された色成分の骨格が保持され、良好な画質で色文字を形成することができる。【0055】さらに、色文字の骨格を形成しておくことにより、その上に形成される他の色の線点状の画像が多量に重なり、その影響は少なく、プリンタエンジン部25における各色のレジストレーションの変動やずれに対して強い画像処理方法となる。

【0056】なお、このような色文字処理によって、入力された画像信号が示す文字色と比べて形成された文字色は若干変化してしまう。しかし、色文字の場合には色の再現性よりもエッジのシャープさの方が望まれるため、本発明のようにエッジを保持した色文字を形成することによって、良好な色文字の再現を行うことができ、画質を向上させることができる。

【0057】また、非常に明るい色について、この色文字処理部46による処理を行うと、色の変化は大きなものがある。しかし上述のように、非常に明るい色についてはこの色文字処理部46による処理を行わないことにより、大きな色の変化を防止している。なお、非常に明るい色の文字は白色などの背景において使用される頻度は少なく、主に反転文字などで使用される場合が多い。反転文字などでは、文字の内部より周囲の方が濃色であるため、周囲の画像において文字のエッジを保存するように処理することが望ましい。

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【0058】逆に非常に暗い文字については図8で示したように各色成分の値が大きくなり、さらに最大の色成分について最大レベルまで飽和させるように色変換を行うと、緑色分量はさらに増大してしまう。そのため、ここでは非常に暗い文字についても色文字処理部46による下色除去処理で述べたとおりである。なお、非常に暗い文字では、スクリーン処理による粗体性は各色成分ともそれほど顕著に現れないため、そのまま下色除去処理も行わずに画像形成を行ってもよい。

【0059】図7に戻り、各文字色ごとに下色除去処理部45、色文字処理部46のいずれかで処理された画像の信号を合成部47で合成し、合成したCMYK色空間の画像信号を衣袋の階調補正部36に送る。階調補正部36で階調補正処理を行った後の画像信号は、色・階調補正処理部23、13の出力となる。

【0060】なお、他の属性の画像についても、それぞれ、色変換処理部31、33、34で各種の色空間変換処理や色補正処理などが施され、さらに階調補正部35、37、38において階調補正処理が施されて出力される。図2に示したシステムでは、この出力を元にスクリーン処理部24でスクリーン処理し、プリンタエンジン部25で被記録媒体上に画像を形成することになる。また、図3に示したシステムでは、この出力がプリンタ2に送られ、画像処理部21でラスタ化処理、スクリーン処理が施されて、プリンタエンジン部25で被記録媒体上に画像を形成することになる。

【0061】上述の実施の一形態では、ホストコンピュータ1とプリンタ2がネットワークなどで接続された画像形成システムを一例として示したが、本発明ではこれに限らない。例えばホストコンピュータ1とプリンタ2が一体となった構成でもよい。また、スキャナやデジタルカメラなどの画像入力機器を備えたシステムを構成してもよく、例えば複写機やファクシミリなどに適用することもできる。このような画像入力機器を備えたシステムでは、画像入力機器から得られた画像から絵文字分離処理などによって各画像領域ごとに属性を判定し、上述のように色文字についてエッジを保存する処理を行えばよい。

【0062】

【発明の効果】以上の説明から明らかなように、本発明によれば、色文字についてエッジを保存した画像が形成できるので、良好な可読性を有する色文字を再現することができる。また、エッジを保存する処理を行う際に、色文字の骨格となる色によってエッジを保持させているので、他の薄い色の線点状の画像を重ねてもエッジは損なわれない。逆に、それらの線点状の画像が重なっても良好な画像を得ることができる。さらに、非常に暗い文字については墨版を生成するため、色材の供給過多や文字周辺部分の抜けなどの画質劣化を防止することができる。

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など、本発明によれば種々の効果がある。

【図面の簡単な説明】

【図1】 本発明の画像形成システムの実施の一形態を示す構成図である。

【図2】 本発明の画像形成システムの実施の一形態における処理の内容の一例を示すブロック図である。

【図3】 本発明の画像形成システムの実施の一形態における処理の内容の別の例を示すブロック図である。

【図4】 色・階調補正処理部の一例を示すブロック図である。

【図5】 色変換処理部32の一例を示すブロック図である。

【図6】 色文字処理部46の一例を示すブロック図である。

【図7】 色変換処理部32の一例における動作例を示すフローチャートである。

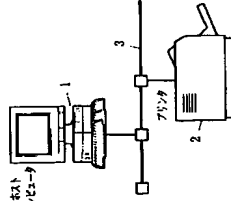
サブフローチャートである。

【図8】 下色除去処理の具体例による説明図である。

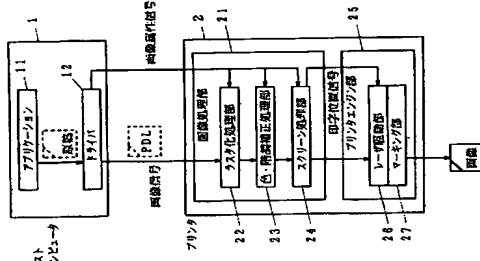
【図9】 色文字処理の具体例による説明図である。【符号の説明】

1…ホストコンピュータ、2…プリンタ、3…ネットワーク、11…アプリケーション、12…ドライバ、13…色・階調補正処理部、21…画像処理部、22…ラスタ化処理部、23…色・階調補正処理部、24…スクリーン処理部、25…プリンタエンジン部、26…レジスタ処理部、27…マスキング部、31…34…色変換処理部、35…38…階調補正部、41、43…色空間変換部、42…領域判定部、44…セクタ、45…下色除去処理部、46…色文字処理部、47…合成部、51…最大色決定部、52…飽和処理部。

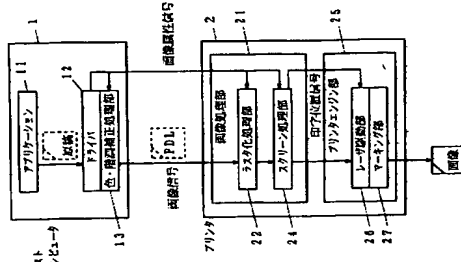
【図1】



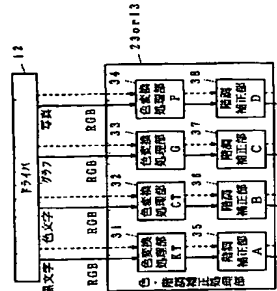
【図2】



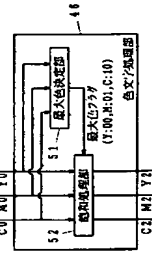
【図3】



【図4】



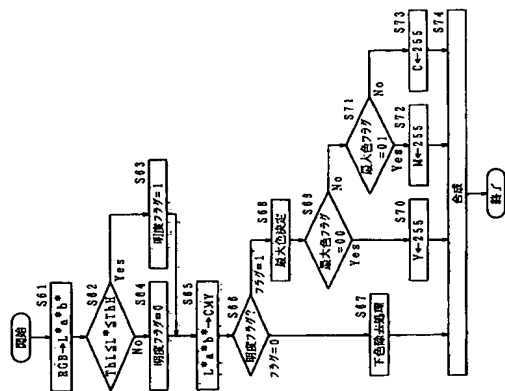
【図6】



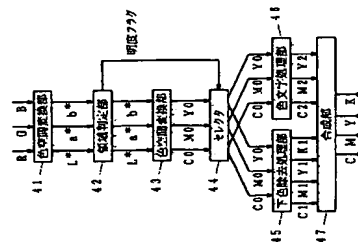
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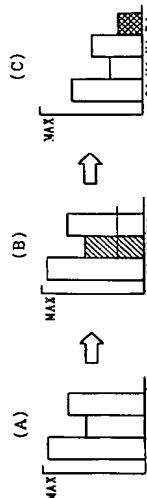
【図7】



【図5】



【図8】



【図9】

